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SUBJECT: EUR A/S FRIED MEETS RUSSIAN HUMAN RIGHTS

OMBUDSMAN: GEORGIA, HR DIALOGUE, POLITKOVSKAYA

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns: 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In his October 21 meeting with EUR A/S Fried, Russia's Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin urged presidential endorsement of the unofficial human rights dialogue initiative organized by his office and the Moscow Carnegie Center, against a backdrop of public disenchantment with the bilateral relationship. He shared USG concerns over GOR treatment of Georgians in Russia, which was exacerbated by a sycophantic bureaucracy, but placed more blame on the Georgian President than on Russia for the deterioration in GOR-GOG relations. Lukin criticized the GOR response to the murder of Anna Politkovskaya, and said the protection of journalists was a critical human rights concern. He argued for greater public attention to the successes of US-GOR cooperation, while agreeing that issues like Kosovo and Georgia could hurt efforts to strengthen the foundation of US-Russian relations. End Summary

¶2. (C) On October 21, EUR Assistant Secretary Daniel Fried met with Russia's Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin, who was accompanied by longtime adviser, Nataliya Borisovna Mirza. Fried briefed Lukin on Russian-Georgian relations (septel), and Fried underscored the Secretary's concern over the tensions in that bilateral relationship and dismay over the anti-Georgian campaign underway in Russia, capped by concern over the murder of journalist Anna Politkovskaya. Fried concluded that it had been a "bad couple of weeks" for Russians and Russia's friends. Noting the failure to finalize details of an unofficial human rights dialogue in advance of the July 2006 G8 summit, Fried reiterated the USG interest in seeing this project succeed.

Human Rights Dialogue

¶3. (C) Lukin agreed that this was a bad period in US-Russian relations and stressed that, no longer a diplomat, he could afford to speak bluntly. Mechanisms for conducting public diplomacy were in poor shape and the public mood had soured against the bilateral relationship. This fact made a difference, both in the Kremlin and MFA, and Lukin noted it was ironic that there was a better dialogue throughout the late Soviet period, regardless of spy scandals and other ruptures politically, than today. That said, Lukin did not see opponents to the proposition of an unofficial human rights dialogue sponsored by his office and the Moscow Carnegie Center, either at the Presidential Administration or MFA: Presidential Aide Prikhodko and Foreign Minister Lavrov and his team were all satisfied with the proposal.

¶4. (C) Lukin made the case for a "public face" to the dialogue, in the form of an endorsement by Presidents Bush and Putin. Without an official imprimatur, he explained, it would become "just one more dialogue." An endorsement by the

Presidents, whether in writing or otherwise, would generate momentum within the Russian human rights community and bureaucracy for the dialogue.

¶15. (C) Fried agreed that it made sense to seek an explicit endorsement of the Presidents, assuming that the Russian government was behind the proposal and could move quickly, and undertook to raise it at senior levels in Washington. Fried stressed that the idea of a roundtable was positive, but that its success would be judged by its ability to address all issues, even politically sensitive ones. Lukin agreed, joking that freedom of speech would be extended to the roundtable participants, and repeated that there was no point in conducting a sterile or "politically correct" exchange. Fried agreed to meet with Lukin during his mid-November trip to Moscow to discuss next steps in securing an endorsement, noting that an announcement by the foreign ministers was another possible option.

Georgia: Assigning Blame

¶16. (C) On Georgian-Russian relations, Lukin assigned Saakashvili 60 percent responsibility for the deterioration in bilateral relations (with Russia responsible for the other 40 percent, by current Russian standards a forthcoming position) and noted that there was little appreciation in Moscow for America's role in restraining the Georgian President; to the contrary, received wisdom was that Saakashvili was acting at US behest. Lukin described this as a function of the "Moscow psychosis." Fried outlined US policy towards Georgia and briefed on his recent consultations in Tbilisi, reiterating that the US was best served by an independent and capable Georgia that had good

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relations with Russia. Fried noted GOG concerns over the prospect of a resumption of ethnic cleansing in Gali and South Ossetia, as well as the possibility of Russian recognition of the separatist territories that could encourage the worst elements in both disputed territories to precipitate conflict with the central government. Fried underscored the dangers of questioning Georgia's territorial integrity and rejected Kosovo (or, in response to Lukin, Eritrea) as a model.

¶17. (C) On internal Russian actions against Georgians and Russian nationals of Georgian origin, Lukin agreed with Fried's characterization of the campaign and said that in the first ten days "our country did not behave in a civilized manner." Lukin noted his own statements on television and to the press on this subject, but pointed to popular anger towards the GOG and the tendency of "sycophants" in the bureaucracy and law enforcement authorities to implement their directives too enthusiastically. The situation in St. Petersburg was not as bad as Moscow, Lukin said, because Governor Matviyenko had taken a firm stance early on against these excesses. Lukin said that the average citizen expected war to break out between Russia and Georgia, which created an atmosphere similar to the one that resulted in America's internment of Japanese during WW2, but conceded Fried's point that this was not an example for a democracy to emulate.

¶18. (C) Lukin posited that the overall situation was improving slowly, but flagged deportations and the politically sensitive issue of illegal immigration. Lukin explained that when he met with General Procurator Chayka he made the point that whereas equal numbers of Tajiks, Azeris and Georgians were rounded up and deported in the past, now the number of Georgians was disproportionately high. The discriminatory application of the law was the problem. Lukin agreed with Fried that this was a grave challenge for a multi-ethnic society.

¶ 9. (C) Fried recognized the importance of Lukin's gesture of attending the Politkovskaya funeral, in the absence of other senior ranking GOR officials, and noted the serious concern raised among Russia-watchers by the GOR's tacit acceptance (even approval) of her death. Lukin said that the problem went beyond the murder of an individual journalist, but encompassed the general vulnerability of journalists. While progress had been made in identifying suspects in the murder of Deputy Central Bank Deputy Governor Kozlov (if not those who ordered the murder), the authorities rarely solved the cases of murdered journalists. Lukin noted that he raised this as a critical issue with Putin in their biannual review of human rights last December. No one could defend the Russian track record.

¶ 10. (C) Lukin described Putin's response to the murder as a question of psychology, agreeing that the Russian President should have responded in a timely fashion, more passionately, with greater diplomacy, and without recourse to aspersions on the influence of the slain reporter. Lukin noted that Politkovskaya was a difficult person, and retrograde in the sense that she was convinced that everything bad in Russia occurred because of the orders of a Politburo-like leadership -- she did not recognize another alternative explanation and, as a result, repeatedly offended many in power, including Putin. For example, Lukin explained, everyone understood that torture occurs in Chechnya. But this is not because Moscow issues an order, but because of a stew of competing local powers, revenge, historical rivalries and betrayals; and lack of bureaucratic order. Lukin repeated that Politkovskaya's death begged the question of how Russia would protect its journalists.

US-Russia: Focus on Successes

¶ 11. (C) Lukin accepted Fried's description of US support for a strong but also democratic and modern Russia, but noted that this was not believed by the general populace. There was an inferiority complex, understandable in light of the fall of the Soviet Union and the hardships of the 1990's; now, however, Russia's economic rejuvenation had led to a rebirth of old stereotypes and illusions. The prescription, Lukin argued, was a period of quiet, a time for Russians to focus on themselves and remaking their society. Where the US could help, Lukin noted, was in directing more public attention to those areas where the US and Russia are cooperating productively. Issues that would complicate this

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task, he explained, included Kosovo. Fried agreed that more needed to be done to sell the relationship, but urged the GOR to refocus the Kosovo debate to one of how Russia could play a positive role in securing the historical presence of Serbs in Kosovo. Georgia, Fried stressed, was another area that handled poorly could prove a setback for US-GOR relations.

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